

Thirty Months at the Dry Tortugas

The materials for history, like wine, increase in value by age. Passing events are the topics of conversation to-day, and drift off before the encroaching waves of to-morrow. A thousand years pass by, and those same events are carefully and painfully dug out from under the rubbish of centuries, and prized above diamonds by the historian. In former times it was not easy to preserve the materials necessary to the complete history of a nation. The books and manuscripts which furnish them for the present historian deal mostly with great events, which form only the skeleton of history; while the flesh and blood and life are wanting. The newspapers of the present age, while laboring only to give the important news of the day, are unconsciously treasuring up materials of incalculable value for the future historian. What a mine of wealth would the files of a paper be which should give as full and detailed an account of each action fought during the Revolutionary War as the papers of to-day furnish of every battle fought in every quarter of the globe! Still there is much matter intimately connected with the history of this country hidden away in old chronicles which has never yet been disinterred.

The colonization of New England, New York, and Virginia is pretty well understood; but the history of the discoveries and early colonization of the Southern coast is not so familiar. Yet it is full of romance. For bold adventure, hardships, suffering, and bravery, it stands unrivaled in the annals of any country. The boundless wealth of gold and jewels discovered in the West India islands and on the Isthmus of Panama filled the Gulf of Mexico with bands of explorers ready for any expedition, however hazardous. These were the discoverers of our Southern coast, and planted the first colonies there. Yet, with the exception of a few, how little of their history is familiarly known to us! The marvelous adventures of Father Hennepin and De Soto are read with thrilling interest; but who can give us a personal narrative of Cartier, Roberval, Cortereal, and others, who, in fact, stand in the portals of our history? A painting for the national capital is yet to be executed, composed of all the portraits of the early discoverers of different portions of this country, with Columbus for the central figure. This will be a history in itself.

Spain having discovered the New World, and taken possession of the largest of the West India islands, left the less tempting regions of the North to England and France. Still, expeditions from these countries to the regions of tropical verdure and exhaustless gold were occasionally made. Thus France, in exploring the mysterious waters of the

Gulf of Mexico, which was the centre of attraction to the civilized world, discovered and took possession of Florida. The Cabots, it is said, discovered it in 1417; but they did not land—they only sailed along the coast. Juan Ponce de Leon, in 1512, landed in north latitude thirty degrees eight minutes, and named the country Florida. He, however, planted no colony.

Sixteen years after a Spaniard, Pamphilo de Narvaez, left some men on it, most of whom perished. A few, however, managed to subsist for a time on an adjacent island, which they called Malhado, from the miseries they endured while they remained upon it. They revolved various schemes by which they might escape, but before any could be put in execution a distemper broke out among the Indians in the country, which the latter attributed to the presence of the Spaniards. Having implicit faith in their power to cure the disease they had produced, the Indians compelled them to lay their hands upon the patient's stomach and exorcise the evil spirit. The poor Spaniards were in a terrible dilemma at this demand, but they were obliged to go through the prescribed ceremony. This they did in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, at the same time repeating the Lord's Prayer. Whether the faith of the poor Indian, like that of those afflicted with the king's evil whom the touch of the English monarch healed, effected his recovery or not, these Spaniards assert that they in almost every case relieved the patient.

In the mean time provisions became so scarce that the Indians had to separate in different directions to obtain food. In doing this they divided the Spaniards among them, who thus became separated, and had to abandon all attempts to get away. Some months after, however, they came together again, and found there were fourteen left of them. They then planned an escape, but were again separated, and thus remained six years. Their apparel soon wore out, and they lived entirely naked like the savages. They at length, however, late in autumn, effected their escape, and struck westward. Coming to a tribe of Indians who had heard of their wonderful power in curing disease, they were received by them with such demonstrations of joy and hospitality that they passed the winter with them. In the spring, however, they again set out on their unknown journey. The account of their adventures reads more like a romance than a narrative of actual experience. Now subsisting on nuts, and again nearly perished with famine, these naked fugitives passed from tribe to tribe, struggling to escape from the apparently endless wilderness, and reach some Spanish colony on the coast of the South Sea.

At length they came to a tribe that did not live on nuts and roots, but raised beans, pumpkins, and onions. The women and men were dressed in deer-skins, and seemed

far in advance of the other tribes in civilization. Here the poor Spaniards having obtained deer-skin cloaks, once more struck into the pathless wilderness, and kept on for two months, one after another perishing by the way, till at last only four remained. These finally came to a tribe, one of whose number had a sword-belt and a horse-shoe hung round his neck by way of ornament. The Spaniards were startled at the sight of these familiar objects, and eagerly inquired of the Indian where he obtained them. He at first replied that the Great Spirit gave them to him; but on being more closely questioned, confessed that some Spaniards had been there and left them. Overjoyed at this unexpected good news they inquired in what direction they had gone, and having ascertained, eagerly pressed forward, believing that they must be in the neighborhood of some Spanish colony or company of explorers. A few days after they suddenly came upon four horsemen. The cavaliers were so astounded at the strange appearance of these men, who spoke the Spanish language, that for some time they could not reply to their eager questioning. When they did, they informed them that they were in New Galicia, and only thirty leagues from the town of St. Michael.

With them the last white man disappeared from Florida, and it lapsed again into its primeval savage solitude, and remained so for ten years. At the end of that time Ferdinand de Soto landed at Espiritu Santo, and commenced that wonderful march through the wilderness to the Mississippi, the termination of which he was doomed never to see.

In 1562—twenty-four years after—a colony was sent out from France under the guidance of Ribaud, who was commissioned by the king. Reaching Florida in safety, he landed at Port Royal on the 14th of August, and began to erect a fort. The little colony numbered three hundred, part of whom were soldiers to protect them from the Indians, and the others artisans and their wives, who were to plant the seeds of a future empire. The fort was not established at the mouth of the river, but some little distance inland.

That little colony presented one of those strange, picturesque, and absorbing scenes with which the early settlement of our country abounds. In the old world nations in masses drove out nations; and even in conquering Spanish America strong and well-disciplined armies, like those under Pizarro and Cortez, hewed their way with the sword through the hosts of barbarians that swarmed on their path. But in that portion of the American continent which forms this Republic, feeble colonies of men, women, and children set themselves down, mere specks on the edge of the boundless wilderness, and alone, and single-handed, fought and toiled their way up to empire. To one who could take in with a single glance this vast continent, those little gashes first made in

the wilderness could scarcely be discerned; but they gradually widened and extended, till now they reach from ocean to ocean.

The colonists landed at Mary River, and at once set to work. The broad deep current swept on in silent majesty to the sea—great tropical trees stood in ranks along its margin, and east their shadows over the frail vessels that swung at anchor on its bosom; while the shores rung with the sound of the axe and the delving spade as they surrounded themselves with the means of protection. Day after day passed away, during which the colonists worked cheerfully—the neighboring sea tempering the tropical heat—till at length their defenses began to assume a somewhat formidable appearance.

Nearly three weeks had thus passed quietly away—the Indians remaining friendly—and all was sunshine around the little colony, when, to their dismay, they saw one morning three Spanish ships sweep round the forest and drop anchor in front of their fort. The French commander immediately sent a messenger to demand the reason of this visit. The Spaniards haughtily replied that they came as enemies, for the whole country belonged to the Spanish crown. The French commander, suspecting no danger except from treachery on the part of the Indians, and the little colony needing all the help that could be afforded to finish the defenses, had sent on shore all but the sailors necessary to man the ships. Seeing the Spanish decks swarming with troops he endeavored to gain time by negotiation, for he knew that the first attempt to re-embark his soldiers would be the signal of attack. He succeeded in this until night, when, under cover of the darkness, he noiselessly dropped down the river, and, hoisting sail, stood out to sea.

The Spaniard at daybreak discovered the trick that had been played him, and immediately gave chase. After cruising about for several days without finding the enemy he resolved to return to the fort. In the mean time the French commander, after sinking the land, made a wide sweep, and came back himself to the fort, which he reached first. Hastily re-embarking his soldiers, and indeed most of the men capable of bearing arms, he in turn became the pursuer, and set out in search of the Spaniards. He found them at the mouth of the river, where they had secretly lauded a strong body of men to tamper with the Indians, and with their aid take the fort by stratagem. The next morning the two little fleets got ready for action. The fact that they were Christians of the same creed, the effect of the boundless solitude that surrounded them, and the imposing mysteries in which they were enveloped, could not subdue their lust of gold and of territory. But as the white sails of the diminutive squadrons were given to the breeze on the morning of the 11th of September a strange weird light fell upon sea and land, and heavy shadows crept over the moaning deep. The aspect of the heavens

rapidly changed; the sun seemed suddenly blotted out, and an inky blackness spread itself over the sky. The combatants had already begun to approach each other when this threatening fearful appearance of nature arrested them. In a known sea, where dangerous storms were expected, this silent, solemn, rapid summoning of the elements to battle would have been appalling; yet here, on the borders of an unknown world, where they were ever surrounded by mysteries, it was to these superstitious men still more alarming. They looked at each other in dismay, and their faces wore a ghastly hue in the deep twilight that had succeeded the bright sunrise like a sudden eclipse. This state of frightful suspense soon gave way to terror; for the black vault above them suddenly gaped and shot forth flame. In a moment the whole heavens were on fire, as if the final conflagration had come, turning the very sea into flame, that shook and trembled under the heavy peals of thunder which incessantly rolled over it. Then came the deluge, beating down the waves that the hurricane strove in vain to lift. The ships could not see each other except when the sheets of fire shot from the sky into the water. Then each spar and rope stood out in bright lines against the heavens, to be swallowed up' the next moment in the blackness of darkness. Hour after hour it thundered and lightened and stormed with a strength and terror to which they had hitherto been strangers. At length the thunder and lightning grew less violent and vivid, but the gale continued to blow, lasting twelve days, and scattering the hostile vessels, half wrecked, over the deep.

In the mean time the Spanish force which had landed did not remain idle. After the storm had ceased they began to bribe the Indians and make reconnaissance of the fort. Although but few remained to defend it except invalids, artisans, women, and children, Captain Laudonniere, who commanded, recommended vigilance, and declared that if each would do his duty they would be able to defeat all attempts of the enemy to enter the fort. But as day after day passed by and no attack was made they became less vigilant, and, wearied by their incessant watching, the men on guard snatched a short repose. The wily savage, constantly on the alert though himself unseen, immediately reported the absence of the guard to the Spaniards. They resolved at once to take advantage of this remissness, and, led on by the Indians, suddenly fell, with wild and savage shouts, upon the unsuspecting colonists. It was just before daybreak, and amidst the darkness and confusion and uproar no regular defense could be made, and after a short, hopeless resistance the fort was taken.

Then followed a scene which rivaled even savage ferocity and barbarity. As the Spaniards swarmed through the inclosure some succeeded in escaping in the darkness to one of the ships that lay in the river, some leaped the palisades and fled into the

surrounding forest, among whom was the Captain; but the greater part were savagely butchered. No quarter was given—the well and sick—men, women, and children—were indiscriminately slaughtered, amidst the most piteous shrieks and cries for mercy; and when the September sun arose over the wilderness he looked on a sight sad enough to move the heart of a savage. The strong and the weak, the old and the young, lay scattered around, hewn into bleeding fragments, while the Indians pondered in amazement on this their first lesson in Christianity.

One of those who escaped into the forest said that he groped around in the darkness till daybreak, when he was startled by hearing two men crying for food and a third praying. Joining these, who proved to be fugitives like himself, they all continued to wander about they knew not whither, but picking up occasionally other stragglers until they formed a little company. After threading the mazes of the tropical wilderness all day and night without food, and without the faintest idea whither they were going, they came to a halt and deliberated on what they had better do.

One of the number, being utterly disheartened, proposed they should surrender themselves to the Spaniards.

“Brothers,” said he, “we are in a sad extremity. Every thing is against us. Heaven, the elements (for the rain was now pouring down), the Spaniards, the forest — all are against us. Nothing is in our favor. What shall we do? If we surrender, perhaps we shall be slain. Well, suppose we are, we shall not suffer long. But maybe the Spaniards will not murder us—they are men, and it is possible their vengeance is satisfied, and they may grant us some terms and treat us as prisoners of war. At any rate, what else can we do? Is it not better to fall into the hands of men than into the claws of wild beasts, or die of famine in the woods?”

To this proposal the majority assented. One, however, pluckier than the rest, remonstrated: “What!” he said, “trust to the cruelty and ferocity of the Spaniards! Never! Trust, rather, in God.” He then went on to speak of Elias and Daniel and the other prophets whose trust was always rewarded—of Peter and Paul, saved in worse extremities—and said that the arm that rescued them was still strong and could deliver. “Don’t forget the flight of the Israelites!” he exclaimed. “What chance of escape had they? Behind them was the foe; before them the sea; on each side the mountains. What then? The Lord opened the sea for them, and engulfed their enemies in it. If he did such things for those who trusted in him, surely he can take care of us in these woods.”

It was a strange spectacle, this little group of fugitives deliberating the question of life and death in the Florida wilderness, and it must be confessed there seemed nothing left them but faith. This appeal to the religious sentiment had its effect. Six, however,

exhausted, wretched, and frightened at the sights and sounds that encountered them at every step in the dense forest, resolved to surrender themselves to the Spaniards. They soon found out, as their companion had predicted, that it would be better to trust to any thing rather than the mercy of the cruel and ferocious Spaniards, for it was afterward discovered that they gave them short shrift.

The parting of these companions in misfortune was a sad one, for all felt that they should never see each other again. Those who remained in the forest were certain that death would be the doom of their comrades who were about to surrender themselves to the Spaniards; while the latter felt equally certain that the same fate awaited those who staid behind, only prolonged and made ten-fold more bitter by famine and sufferings. Having embraced for the last time, and commended each to the mercy of God, they separated. The six turned their faces again toward the fort, and slowly marched forward, prepared for any fate that might be in store for them.

As they drew near the little clearing that surrounded the fort they heard the cries and shouts of the Spaniards, yet they pressed tremblingly on. As soon as they cleared the woods they were discovered by the Spaniards, who rushed fiercely toward them. The poor Frenchmen threw up their hands beseechingly, and falling on their knees, humbly begged for mercy. The appeal was met with taunts and derisive laughter. The Spaniards rushed on them with savage shouts, and seizing them by the hair and arms, dragged them into the fort. With fiendish cruelty they pulled them up to the mangled corpses of the men, women, and children that lay about in scattered fragments, and laughed at the expression of horror that stole over their faces. They then took them, one by one, and chopped them up as they had the others.

In the mean time Ribaud returned with a part of his ships, and anchored within a few hundred feet of the fort. The Spaniards immediately opened on him with his own guns, which had been mounted since he left. These, however, owing to the incompleteness of the works, had not yet been got in range, and hence could do but little damage. After firing a while, they sent a trumpeter to the shore, who summoned him to surrender. Ribaud sternly refused. They then sent a colonel with the proposition that if the French would surrender the ships they might have the batteaux lying in the river, and transport all their goods to them, and depart unmolested. Ribaud replied that France had no quarrel with Spain; that the two nations were at peace; that he had been sent six months ago, with a full commission from his king, to establish this colony; that he was specially instructed to make no descent on Spanish territory, or make exactions of any one, and not even to approach a Spanish colony for fear of giving offense. With these instructions he said he had strictly complied, and done nothing to offend the

Spaniards, much less to provoke this cruel, barbarous massacre. “As to the ships which you demand,” said he, “you can’t have them unless you prove the strongest; for I shall employ all the means God has put in my power to keep them.” The colonel then took leave, and reported on shore the result of his mission.

The rage of the Spaniards at this cool defiance burst over all bounds. They leaped about, brandishing their weapons, and rushed toward the shore uttering shouts of vengeance. Finding they could not reach their living foes, they again attacked the dead, and held up the mutilated fragments with derisive shouts and mocking language. Their ferocity, maddened by its own powerlessness, grew wilder; and gouging out the eyes from the trunkless heads, they took them and the dissevered feet and arms and plucked-out tongues in their hands, and rushing to the shore, hurled them, with bitter taunts and mad shouts, toward the ships. The bloody fragments fell in a shower into the water, leaving purple streaks where they sunk. The French, unable to look on the distressing, horrid spectacle, turned their faces the other way.

At length the Spaniards became tired of this useless display of ferocity, and returned, in baffled and disappointed rage, to the fort, and the shades of the September night shut out this strange scene with which the history of Florida commences.

In the mean time those in the woods, ignorant of the fate of their companions, continued to thread the labyrinths of the forest, endeavoring to find their way to the sea-shore. They made, as they supposed, a wide detour to escape the fort; but without guide or compass, they soon got hopelessly lost. They were totally ignorant which way they were going, for there was no sun or stars to guide them, while on every side the limited prospect was the same. Hungry, weary, and half-clad, they continued to toil on, upheld only by that firm trust in a merciful Heaven with which they had parted from their companions. At length they came to a high hill, from the top of which they could discern the sea, though it appeared to be a great distance off, while the country between presented a sad alternation of hills and streams and marshes that seemed almost impassable. They however took courage from the sight of the sea, as though its inhospitable bosom would furnish them protection and a home. Vain as this expectation seems, still there was some hope of succor if they could once reach the shore, while in the woods certain death awaited them. Without arms with which to supply themselves with food—exposed to hidden serpents and ferocious beasts, and savages still more to be dreaded—they thought if they could once stand by the open sea most of these dangers would be escaped, while they hoped to see some of their own ships passing by or waiting near to receive any fugitives that might have escaped.

Not daring to deviate from a straight line, as they had no compass, they took their course, and moved straight forward. As they began to descend the mountain, they found their path crossed by precipices and rocks rolled into confusion. Down and over these they swung themselves as they best could, and struggled on hour after hour, lacerated and torn and bleeding. Catching the branch of a tree, they would swing off the face of a precipice, and passing hand over hand to the trunk, descend to the base. Pushing each other up and easing each other down the huge rocks, they worked their way slowly forward. Often hanging in mid-air, they saved their lives only at the expense of gashed and bloody hands. At last they reached the bottom and paused to breathe. Alas! the sea was no longer visible, while a few rods in advance the deep tropical vegetation shut out the mountain—their only landmark—and even the overcast sky itself except in mere patches; for it was perpetual twilight there even in mid-day. Guessing at their course, they came at length to a ridge, over which they scrambled, impeded at every step by the thorns and briars, which soon tore away nearly all that was left of their scanty clothing, and left their bodies seamed and bloody. At the foot they found a broad marsh, through which they floundered, sinking deeper and deeper at every step. To increase their misery and complete their discouragement, a tropical thunder-storm just then burst upon them, so that they literally marched between two floods—one above and one below. At length, in utter discouragement, they stopped and looked at each other in mute interrogation; but inevitable death was behind them: there was nothing left them but to advance; and with bowed forms and in dead silence they staggered forward. But as they advanced the water continued to grow deeper, and there seemed no end to this fearful everglade. Hope now seemed blotted out, and almost simultaneously they began to groan and cry to God for help. Stopping, they embraced each other with streaming eyes, and, falling on their knees, sent up a piteous supplication to Heaven to be saved from the awful death that threatened them. Broken and humbled to the earth, they confessed their great wickedness, and concluded their prayer by imploring, if they must die there, to be enabled to die like Christians—calmly, and not in frenzy and defiance. “Spirit of Christ,” said they, “cast out Satan; for if we must die, let us die in faith, so that we may live again amidst the saints in heaven!”

Prayer being ended, they arose, and, bending under the pitiless storm, with the water to their waists, waded slowly forward, though sinking deeper and deeper at every step. At length they came to a deep, broad river, rolling turbidly through the marsh, the overflow of which had made the shallow lake through which they had been so long wading. Here the poor fellows paused and gave up in despair, while tears, such as strong men shed only when overtasked nature can do and suffer no more, rolled down

their cheeks. They dared not attempt to swim the stream, for the current, swollen by the recent storms, was wild and rapid. They stood for a while grouped together in the water, and asked in dismay what next was to be done. At length one of the number, recollecting the forest they had left far behind, told them to wait where they were, and keep up good courage, and put their trust in God. Leaving them lost in conjecture at his strange language and conduct, he waded back to the woods, and found a portion of a dead tree, which he floated back to the river. As he drew near he shouted, "See here, this log will help us over!" his plan was simple, and soon explained. Each one was to put his arm around the log and wade in as far as he could, carrying it along, and when they all got beyond their depth swim with it as a buoy. They did so, and soon found themselves launched on the turbulent flood. Now shooting rapidly down stream, and now completely submerged in the waves, they still held bravely on, and, though carried far down by the current, continued to approach slowly the farther side, and at length reached it in safety, though nearly overcome with the effort. The spot where they landed was a high bank, which proved to be dangerous as the river. In their exhausted state it was almost impossible to pull themselves by the roots to the top. They finally succeeded, however, and sat down, half dead, to breathe. After comparing notes, they took courage, and spoke cheerfully of final deliverance; for they all agreed that they were in an immense forest, which they had observed from the top of the mountain to stretch nearly to the sea.

Resuming their march they came to a smaller stream, which they passed in the same way as the other, and at evening, to their great joy, emerged from the woods upon a desert plain. They now believed themselves near the sea, and, worn and hungry, resolved to wait for the revelations of the morning. They dared not encamp, and so each selected a tree and leaned against it to snatch a little repose. Though completely worn out they could not sleep from fear; for the neighboring forest was alive with the strange and discordant sounds of wild beasts. Almost entirely naked, they stood crouching in the darkness against the wet trees, watching anxiously for the first gray streak of dawn.

Just before daybreak there suddenly flashed out in the darkness two flaming fire-halls. By the dim starlight the animal to which they belonged was magnified four-fold, and seemed to the terrified Frenchmen a monster of unearthly size. It was hump-backed, with a huge shaggy head, in the centre of which sparkled those two orbs of fire. Trembling in every limb, they stood still and gazed fixedly upon it, daring neither to speak nor run. The huge animal emitted no sound nor offered to approach, but stood for a long time steadily gazing on those forms that seemed a part of the trees, so moveless

were they. At length, having satisfied its curiosity, it moved leisurely away into the forest, and the Frenchmen heaved a sigh of relief,

Soon after the welcome light of morning broke over the desolate scene, and, after kneeling and thanking Heaven for the preservation of the night, the hungry wretches pushed on in the direction they supposed the sea to lie. Though they had escaped the forests they had little cause for congratulation, for the country over which they now toiled was one vast marsh covered with water and reeds, and in some places so miry they could scarcely place one foot before another. Still sustained by the belief that they were approaching the sea they toiled hopefully forward, though with empty stomachs and aching bones. The sea offering the only way of escape to them, they had fixed their entire thought upon it. There had been no other topic of conversation, no other subject of meditation by day or night, till the sea had come to fill the whole horizon of their vision. They dreamed of the sea, strained their eyes constantly forward for the first gleam of its blue waters, just as if the sea could give them food and clothing and safety. When they should reach it, what would its heavy swell, as it crashed on the desolate strand, speak to them of hope and safety! What could they find in the broad and blue expanse, over which only the seagull was to be seen as he swung lazily after his prey, to inspire cheerful thoughts? Yet they had yearned toward it so long and intensely, as the last refuge of despair, that it had become, for the time being, the Ultima Thule of their expectations and desires.

Pressing on, they would ever and anon pause to listen if they could not hear the far-off roar of waves; but the same oppressive silence reigned over the barren waste—the same monotonous prospect met them at every step.

In the latter part of the afternoon they discovered in the distance human figures moving among the reeds. They stopped and scrutinized them carefully, and finally concluded either they were Spaniards, or Indians sent by them, their way. There was, however, no must meet retreat; they whatever



lay before them, and they resolved to continue their march. As they drew nearer they discovered, to their great surprise and joy, that those unclad forms were fugitives, like themselves, who had escaped from the fort in a different direction, and sought safety in the forest, and were also seeking the sea. Among them was the Captain of the fort, the chamber-maid, and many other men and women—twenty-six in all—entirely naked, and suffering the extremes of fatigue and hunger. It was a sad meeting, in a sad and desolate place. Yet it inspired new hope, and gave new courage.

After the first eager inquiries were over they deliberated together as to the course they should pursue. Seeing some high trees a little distance ahead, standing alone in the marsh, they resolved to proceed thither, and send some of the strongest to the top to scan the vast level. They did so, and two, climbing hastily the tall stems, were able to see, far away, the blue ocean, and nearer by, in a sort of bayou or creek, one of their own vessels, which, it afterward was ascertained, had come there on purpose to succor any stragglers that might endeavor to reach the sea-coast. Its commander kept a sharp lookout, and no sooner was a signal hoisted from the tree-tops than it was answered from the ship. A shout immediately fell from those on watch, answered with a will by the naked, famished group below. In a few minutes a boat was seen to put off and pull for the shore. As the men descended and reported this, the joy of the half-starved company broke forth in passionate exclamations; but when they reported also that between them and the boat was a vast marsh and two broad stretches of water, hope gave way again to despair.

On inquiry, however, it was ascertained that both parties had crossed the streams that barred their passage to the sea in the same manner; and fearing as they left the forest, that they would be unable to pass other streams which they might encounter, they, though borne down with fatigue, had carried these sticks of timber with them. These they now proposed to lash together and make a light raft, with which to pass the water spaces between them and their friends. The distance to the first river was great, and the ground so impassable, that it seemed for a while as if their combined strength could not get the logs along. But some of the sailors who were among the fugitives took hold and bore the pieces to the water.

They at length reached the boat, and the demand for exertion having ceased, they threw themselves into the bottom, and were rowed, more dead than alive, to the ship. Here bread and water and clothing were furnished them, and gradually they came back to life and joyful consciousness of their deliverance. They then assembled together on deck, and publicly thanked Heaven that had saved them, against hope, through infinite dangers and death which had beset them on all sides so long. Though longing

for repose, they could not sleep, for those on board kept them awake nearly all night recounting their marvelous adventures, sufferings, and perils.

There is an additional account given by some of the old chronicles, which it is not easy to reconcile with that related by others. As we have stated before, after the fort was taken, and the tempest somewhat subsided, some of the French ships returned from their pursuit of the Spaniards. One vessel which perished in the storm was cast ashore some fifteen leagues from the fort. The entire crew, however, escaped, except one, and were soon exposed to all the horrors of famine on the desolate coast. After living on roots and herbs eight days, they, in their wanderings, according to one writer, came upon a little boat, in which they were determined to go to the fort, of whose fate they were ignorant. It was not large enough, however, to carry them all, and Jean Ribaud, in the extremity, called a council and addressed them, saying that it was impossible to live long where they were, and as the boat could carry but a small number, he advised that some should take it, and go to the fort for relief. He and fifteen others were selected to undertake the mission. Before they set sail, however, a Spanish bark arrived, the commander of which, perceiving their ignorance of what had occurred, spoke them fair, and persuaded Ribaud and thirty others to accompany him to the fort. When he had got them in his power he chained them two and two, and before they reached the fort butchered the whole. Ribaud pleaded the Spaniard's promise, but in vain. He was struck with a dagger from behind, and thrown down. Before he could rise the blows were repeated till he was dead. He was then dismembered, and his head cut into four parts, and stuck on the four corners of the fort.

This does not agree with the account given by others, who state that Ribaud returned in safety to France. Whether the discrepancy grows out of the fact that there were two Ribaud, Jean and Jacques, and one of them perished in this manner, it is impossible to say. It is probable that the deception and massacre occurred, as there could be no inducement to invent the story, as it does not in the least enhance the atrocity and cruelty of the Spaniards.

Having waited a sufficient time to receive all the fugitives that might have fled to the forest, the captain joined the only remaining ship that had survived the tempest, and called a conference to decide on their future course. The few that remained of those three hundred colonists presented a sad spectacle as they assembled on deck and talked over their prospects. A short distance up the river, that rolled its current tranquilly into the sea, as if in mockery of their woes, stood their captured fort, still reeking with the blood of their comrades. Near by, the beach was strewn with the shattered timbers of one of their vessels. Of the seven ships that started with such buoyant hearts from the

shores of France these two only remained to carry back the shattered fortunes of the colony. The long stretch of wilderness that bounded the horizon looked gloomier than ever, and the vast sea to be traversed seemed almost boundless to their aching hearts. There was, however, no chance for divided opinion in that little council. The fort in the hands of their enemies, its inmates massacred, most of the munitions of war seized, and their fleet dispersed, it was hopeless to attempt to re-establish themselves on the coast. There remained but the sad alternative to retrace their way across the broad Atlantic. This being decided upon, the survivors were equally divided between the two ships, and on the 27th of September they turned their prows homeward.

Only about three weeks had transpired since they had arrived at that spot, full of visions of gold and future greatness; yet in that short period, as they looked back upon it, there seemed crowded the events of a lifetime. Then the glad shouts of Land ho! rang from ship to ship, and merry sounds broke the stillness of the solitary scene. Now, sorrow and gloomy forebodings sealed the lips in silence, and even the voices of the sailors, as they sheeted home the canvas, lacked the ordinary excitement of "homeward bound."

It seemed as if fate was determined to push this little band to despair, for scarcely had the land disappeared when a furious storm arose.

But as if the howling wind and the pitiless deep were not enough of themselves to cast down their hearts, a Spanish vessel hove in sight and bore steadily down upon them, and soon her guns boomed louder than the storm. The French, however, instead of being disheartened by this new danger, were filled with the thirst for vengeance. The sight of the enemy which had wrought them such foul wrong made them forget every thing else, and they closed with the Spaniards with a ferocity that astonished them. They made such deadly work on the deck that in a short time the blood was seen trickling from the scuppers. But for the tremendous sea running, they would have lashed themselves to the hostile vessel and massacred every man on board. The Spaniard, finding himself so roughly handled, hoisted sail and bore away. The French lost but one man, the cook. Without further mishaps they reached their native land in safety.

Thus began and ended the first and only French colony in Florida. Although, from this time, France abandoned forever all attempts at colonization, she determined on vengeance.

The story of the massacre, with its attendant atrocities, created an immense sensation in France, and it was expected that an expedition would immediately be fitted out to chastise the Spaniards and avenge the insulted honor of France. But between

the negotiations that followed and fear of provoking a war nothing was done for three years.

At length a determined man, Captain Dominique de Gourges, resolved to avenge his countrymen and punish the insult to France on his own responsibility. He had acquired a reputation both for skill and bravery in Scotland and Piedmont, and was well fitted by nature and experience to be the leader of such an expedition. He declared to his intimate friends that he would avenge the cruelty of the Spaniards or die in the attempt. He had no means of his own, and would not ask the aid of Government, as he wished not to implicate it, and wished also the expedition to be a secret one; for he knew that any open preparation would send a Spanish fleet to the aid of the Spaniards. Appealing to his personal friends, Gourges borrowed sufficient money from them to buy and equip three vessels. Not daring to reveal his true object lest he might not be able to get volunteers for so hazardous an enterprise, and one which promised no booty, he gave out that he was going to the coast of Africa for slaves. He was thus enabled to collect a daring crew, and one well calculated to carry out the terrible revenge he had planned.

Having obtained 500 volunteers, and laying in provisions for a year, he set sail from Bordeaux on the 2d of August. A heavy storm, however, arose, which kept them from going to sea for eight days. This bold adventurer chafed under the long delay, and saw, with ill-concealed irritation, eight days' provisions consumed in port. He at length stood out to sea, but had not gone far beyond Rochelle when another storm drove him into port and imprisoned him eight days more. The crew looked on this as a bad omen, and began to show signs of discontent.

At last the heavens cleared up, and Captain Gourges once more hoisted sail and bore away for the coast of Spain; but when off Cape Finisterre he was met by another fearful storm. For days the crowded little vessels lay at the mercy of the waves—one was driven out of sight, and did not make her appearance again for nearly a week. The men, frantic with fear, gathered around the Captain, and begged him to return to France and give up the ill-starred expedition; but the bold man sternly refused. When the storm broke he went into a river of Barbary to recruit. Putting to sea again, he sailed to Cape Blanc, where, on landing, he was assailed by a host of barbarians, whom he repulsed with great loss. He proceeded thence to Cape Verd, when he took the open sea and stretched boldly across the Atlantic.

It was no ordinary determination that dared thus to carry out a deliberate deception on 500 men. Reaching Cuba, he assembled them on shore, and, for the first time, revealed his destination and the object of his expedition. At first the men were

speechless with amazement and consternation. Instead of obtaining a rich prize on the African coast, they had crossed the Atlantic for the sole purpose of storming a Spanish fort.

But Captain Gourges was prepared for this critical emergency, and instead of endeavoring to pacify them with fair words and promises, he told them the story of the massacre. He described the colonists, spoke of their peaceable intentions and fair prospects until the arrival of the Spaniards. He then passed on to the fatal night of the assault. The terrific scene which, for two long years, had ever been present to his imagination, till his whole being was concentrated into one burning desire for vengeance, he portrayed before them. He made the air ring once more with the shrieks of the women, the cries of the children, and vain prayers of the sick. He dwelt on individual cases of cruelty; described with terrible minuteness the frightful spectacle the ground presented strewn with the bleeding fragments of the hewn and hacked bodies; and, finally, in language that chilled the blood in their veins, told them of the last insult, when the Spaniards with curses and taunts hurled feet and arms and heads toward the French ships. He melted them to pity one moment, and the next kindled into frightful intensity the thirst for vengeance. In their excitement the men forgot the deception that had been practiced on them, and when the Captain closed one feeling pervaded every heart, the same light blazed in every eye, and there passed through the crowd one deep oath of vengeance, and with loud shouts they swore they would follow him to the death.

Taking advantage of the full moon to navigate the Bahamas, he soon came in sight of Florida.

The Spaniards, in addition to the French fort which had been built some distance up the river, had erected two other forts at the mouth of the river on either bank. As the French hove in sight the Spaniards, thinking they were Spanish vessels, fired a salute. Gourges, to confirm the delusion, returned it, and kept on till night, when he changed his course and came back to within twenty or thirty miles of the forts, and entered a small river to escape observation. In the morning he found the shore lined with savages. He had expected this, and knowing with what cruelty the Spaniards invariably treated the natives, had calculated on making them his allies.

At Porto Rico he found a French trumpeter who was formerly with the French in Florida, well known by the Indians, and understood somewhat their language. This man he had taken along as an interpreter, and now sent him ashore to speak with the Indians. They immediately recognized him, and began to dance with joy. They asked about the ships, and what they had come for. He replied that they were French, and had come to

renew their friendship with the chiefs and bring presents. One chief named Santerina, sent a messenger to Captain Gourges to know if that was so. The Captain replied that it was, but said nothing about the enterprise till he could sound him on his feelings toward the Spaniards. They then danced again, and shouted to show their delight.

The Captain, after an interchange of civilities, dismissed Santerina with the request to bring next day all the chiefs who were his allies to see him. As soon as the Indians had departed he sent his pilot to sound the river farther up so as to conceal his ships more effectually. The next day the chief with a host of his allies presented himself. The Captain went ashore with his soldiers; but the Indians would not approach so long as they retained their arms, and to show their own peaceable intentions threw their bows and arrows and knives on the ground. The Captain ordered his men to lay aside every thing but their swords when the chief advanced to meet him. The Captain and Santerina sat down together on a moss-covered log while the Indians cleared a space around them by pulling up all the weeds and grass, and removing the rubbish. The Captain then began to sound the chief, but he was saved all diplomacy, for the latter interrupted him with a tirade against the Spaniards. He said the Indians had not had a good day since the French left Florida. The Spaniards had fought them all the time—driven them from their homes, and hunted them like wild beasts through the forest. They had seized and violated their wives, and ravished their daughters, in broad daylight, before their eyes, and heaped wrong and insult without measure upon their defenseless heads, and all because they had been friendly to the French. He said they had one French child among them saved from the massacre whom the Spaniards had tried to get possession of to kill him, but he prevented them.

The way was now clear to the Captain, and without any circumlocution he told him that he was about to punish the Spaniards and avenge the wrongs of the Indian. Santerina was beside himself with joy, and exclaimed, “How happy we shall be!” The Captain then remarked that he supposed the chiefs would like to volunteer their aid, and share the pleasure and honor of chastising the Spaniards. “Yes,” exclaimed the chief “we will, and will all die for you!”

The Captain, having obtained all he wanted, thanked and praised the chiefs, and bestowed presents upon them. Thinking it was best to strike while the iron was hot, he asked the chief how long it would take to assemble his warriors. “In three days,” said he, “I’ll be here again and ready.” The Captain then bade him to depart at once, but be careful and keep his secret lest their plans should reach the Spaniards. The chief promised, saying: “We hate the Spaniards worse than you do.” “Well,” said the Captain, “then hurry, but leave me three of your best men to assist me in reconnoitering

the forts while you are gone. He did so; and in a few minutes the last of the savages disappeared with long bounds into the surrounding forest, and the Captain returned to his ship.

In three days, at the same hour in the morning, Santerina, followed by his painted warriors, burst, with a war-shout, from the dark forest, and drew up on the bank of the river. No time was now to be lost; and the Captain, who had made his reconnaissance, appointed a place of rendezvous on a stream not far from the fort, and dismissed them.

When they were gone he assembled his men and harangued them. He told them it was a perilous undertaking in which they were embarked, for there were three forts garrisoned with 400 men, and defended by cannon, which they must carry sword in hand or die in the attempt. The men answered with enthusiastic shouts, and demanded to be led on. The Captain next addressed the sailors, whom he was to leave in charge of the ships, and gave them his last instructions, telling them if he did not return by a certain time they might know he was dead, and must make the best of their way back to France. The sailors wept, and embraced their friends as those whom they never should see again.

The Captain then embarked his men in launches and steered for the place of rendezvous. When he arrived there, he found his allies waiting for him. After the Indians should be carried across, he directed that the bark should make its way carefully to the River Mary, on which the forts stood, and lie concealed until the first fort was taken, and then hasten up to transport his troops across to the second fort. While the savages were being brought over, the Captain, though he had eaten nothing for nearly twenty-four hours, hastened forward with a small party to reconnoitre. Coming to a small river running parallel to the one on which the forts stood, and near them, he found to his chagrin that, owing to the high tide, it could not be forded. One of the chiefs then took him farther up stream, where he thought it could be passed; but there had been a strong wind the day before, which had made the tide higher than usual, and he could not get over. He noticed, however, that the water was falling. Returning to his men, he directed them to remain where they were till morning. Soon after dark a heavy rain set in, drenching them to the skin and flooding the ground with water. The Captain's chief anxiety, however, was for the ammunition and arms of his followers.

The hours dragged slowly on, but at length the morning broke clear and bright. The brisk west wind that swayed the tree-tops overhead revived the drooping spirits of the men, and they were once more eager to be led on. The Captain again reconnoitred, and found the stream so shallow that it could be easily passed. The Spaniards had cleared the ground to a great extent between them and the stream that ran near, but had in one

place left a clump of trees running from the fort to the bank. The Captain immediately resolved to cross under cover of this. He did so—the soldiers lifting their arms, and the Indians their bows, above their heads as they waded over the sharp oyster-beds to the farther side. As soon as all were across the Captain arranged his little band behind the woods, and made known his plan of attack, which, however, was frustrated by the unforeseen conduct of the Spaniards.

When all was ready he addressed them, saying they had now reached the object for which they had toiled so long, and the hour of vengeance was come. He expressed his confidence in their bravery, and said that their faces assured him that they would prove worthy of their king and country, and waving his hand toward the fort, exclaimed: “Behold the thieves, the traitors, the murderers — “Allons! Allons!””, ran in low but determined accents through the ranks, and the order to advance was given.

When they emerged from the woods they were about seventy yards from the fort. It so happened that a cannonier was arranging at the time a cannon on a platform, and discovered them the moment they broke cover, and immediately shouted, “To arms! to arms !” and touched off the gun. The loud echo, as it rolled away through the forest, filled the Spaniards with consternation, and all was confusion and terror. The soldiers leaped to the ramparts, and when they saw the French flag waving in the morning breeze knew that the hour of retribution had come. The French, the moment they found they were discovered, quickened their pace, and at the charge step, with heads down, advanced straight on the fort. The cannonier discharged his piece the second time, but without damage, as he had no time to get the range. As he was loading it the third time a chief sprang, with the agility of a panther, to the platform, and drove his tomahawk through the head of the cannonier. The Spaniards, panic stricken, now swarmed out of the fort, and endeavored to fall back on the large fort farther up the river. Then came the turn of the savages. They swarmed like bees through the forest, and getting in advance, drove the Spaniards back on the French. Hemmed in and paralyzed with terror, they could offer no resistance, and were slaughtered like sheep. Savage shouts and yells mingled in with cries for mercy and sounds of fire-arms, while at intervals came the booming of cannon which had opened from the fort on the opposite side of the river.

Not one escaped, and Gourges had great difficulty in rescuing a few prisoners from the hands of the infuriated French and not less excited savages, to be reserved for a more terrible example.

The French found three pieces of artillery in the fort with the French mark on them, which exasperated them still more. With these they returned the fire of the

fort opposite, until the bark, which had arrived in the river below, could come up and transport the troops across. As soon as it did they were embarked. The Indians, who were to follow, would not wait to be rowed over, but dashing into the stream, and holding their bows and tomahawks over their heads, boldly swam across. The Spaniards, seeing the bark crowded with troops and the river swarming with swimmers, whom they took to be French, fled in dismay to the woods. Most of them would have escaped the vengeance of the French but for Gourgès's swarthy allies. The Spaniards were no match for them in the woods, and they were soon completely surrounded, when the work of butchery commenced. As in the taking of the other fort, Gourgès had hard work to save a few for the rope.

After the work of destruction was finished the Captain returned to the other fort, so as to be on the same side of the stream with the large fort. He immediately began to fortify it, as he was uncertain how much time might be consumed in capturing the large fort. Here he rested Sunday and Monday, and, in the mean time, closely interrogated the prisoners he had spared respecting its condition and means of defense. Having obtained all the information he desired, he resolved next day to attack it, and hastily making his preparations, set out at daybreak. To prevent any surprise he left a guard at the fort, and stationed another at the mouth of the river.

As soon as he came in sight of the fort the cannon, which had been trained to range down the river, opened upon him. Finding this better practice than he had met at the other forts, he turned into the woods, and seeing a small hill covered with trees near the fort, ordered his followers to run and take shelter there. By holding this hill as a screen he found he could get near enough to the fort to reconnoitre it without being seen. Having finished his examinations he resolved to make the attack next day. On one side he found the fosse was not flanked, and here he resolved to escalade it, while marksmen in ambush should keep the ramparts clear. In the mean time the Spaniards, ignorant of all these movements, sent sixteen of their bravest men out to reconnoitre. These, creeping along the fosse, made their way toward the French encampment. Their movements were discovered, however, and reported to the Captain, who sent out men to lie in ambush and cut off their retreat, when he should attack them in flout, he gave strict orders not to fire, but trust solely to the sword. As the Spaniards, suspecting nothing, emerged from the fosse, Gourgès fell suddenly upon them. Taken by surprise, they turned to flee, when they were met by the party in ambush, and thus attacked on both sides, fell every man of them under the sword. The garrison, utterly disheartened at the loss of their best soldiers, conferred together to determine what it was best to do. They finally resolved to hide in the woods till the French should depart. Gourgès,

in anticipation of this, had filled the forest around the fort with Indians. The moment, therefore, the Spaniards appeared outside of the gates they were surrounded and tomahawked. Some, however, as before, were saved to die as thieves.

Five cannon and a magazine of powder were found in the fort. The guns the Captain put aboard his bark, and the next day set fire to the magazine. When the smoke and dust that followed the explosion had cleared away the fort was a mass of ruins.

Assembling the prisoners he addressed them on the wickedness of their conduct. He told them they had acted contrary to all the usages of war among civilized nations, and that too when Spain and France were at peace. That the soldiers of a Catholic Christian king should massacre in cold blood the subjects of another Christian king, when the two were at peace with each other, was unheard of among civilized nations. Having read them a sound moral lecture on the enormity of their offense, he gave them no time to make an improvement of it, but triced them up incontinently to the surrounding trees, and left them to swing and blacken on the desolate shore. He then returned to the first fort, and served the thirty prisoners he had left there in the same way.

The last Spaniard now being disposed of, Gourges prepared to depart. First, however, he addressed the chiefs —congratulated them on their deliverance from the Spaniards, and advised them not to leave those two remaining forts standing. They immediately took the hint, and soon not one stone was left upon another.

Returning to his ships Captain Gourges took an affectionate leave of his Indian allies, and then assembled his followers and publicly returned thanks to God for saving them from tempests and all other dangers, and especially for the signal success that had attended their arms in inflicting just punishment on the Spaniards.

On the 3d of May he weighed anchor and stood out to sea. On his way home he got out of provisions, and after many days of suffering providentially came across a ship which supplied him. On another occasion he lost a boat with eight soldiers in it. At last, on the 6th of June, having passed safely through all his perils, he entered the port of Rochelle. The report of the summary vengeance he had inflicted on the Spaniards became the topic of universal conversation, and Captain Gourges was the lion of the day.

There is something sublime in the high courage and unfaltering resolution with which this man carried out a great purpose. He never swerves, never desponds, but moves right on over every difficulty, through every peril, to its accomplishment. France's leave-taking of Florida was written in bloody characters.